DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 577 PS 016 325

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TITLE The Effects of Television on Children. Foundation for Child and Youth Studies Selected Papers Number 47.
INSTITUTION Foundation for Child and Youth Studies, Kensington (Australia).
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 21p.; Produced by the Education & Research Unit.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Childrens Television; Developmental Stages; *Mass Media Effects; *Parent Responsibility; Socialization; *Television Viewing; *Violence

ABSTRACT

This paper begins with an introduction which covers viewing time; television as a significant developmental experience; Piagetian stages of cognitive development; and changing developmental tastes in television viewing. The paper then focuses on television in relation to learning; television and violence; advertising; and parents' ability to affect children's reactions to television. The discussion of television and learning explores active and passive television viewing; Sesame Street; television as a socialization agent; and relations between the three factors of cognitive learning, education, and television. Television and violence are discussed in terms of research findings. It is concluded that in general it is not desirable to televise violence. The discussion of television and advertising reports effects of televised ads on children. The concluding section, on television and parents, explores findings which suggest that parents who mediate their children's television viewing have a positive influence on their children. It is concluded that what a child does with television and what television does to a child are reciprocal and interdependent processes. (RH)

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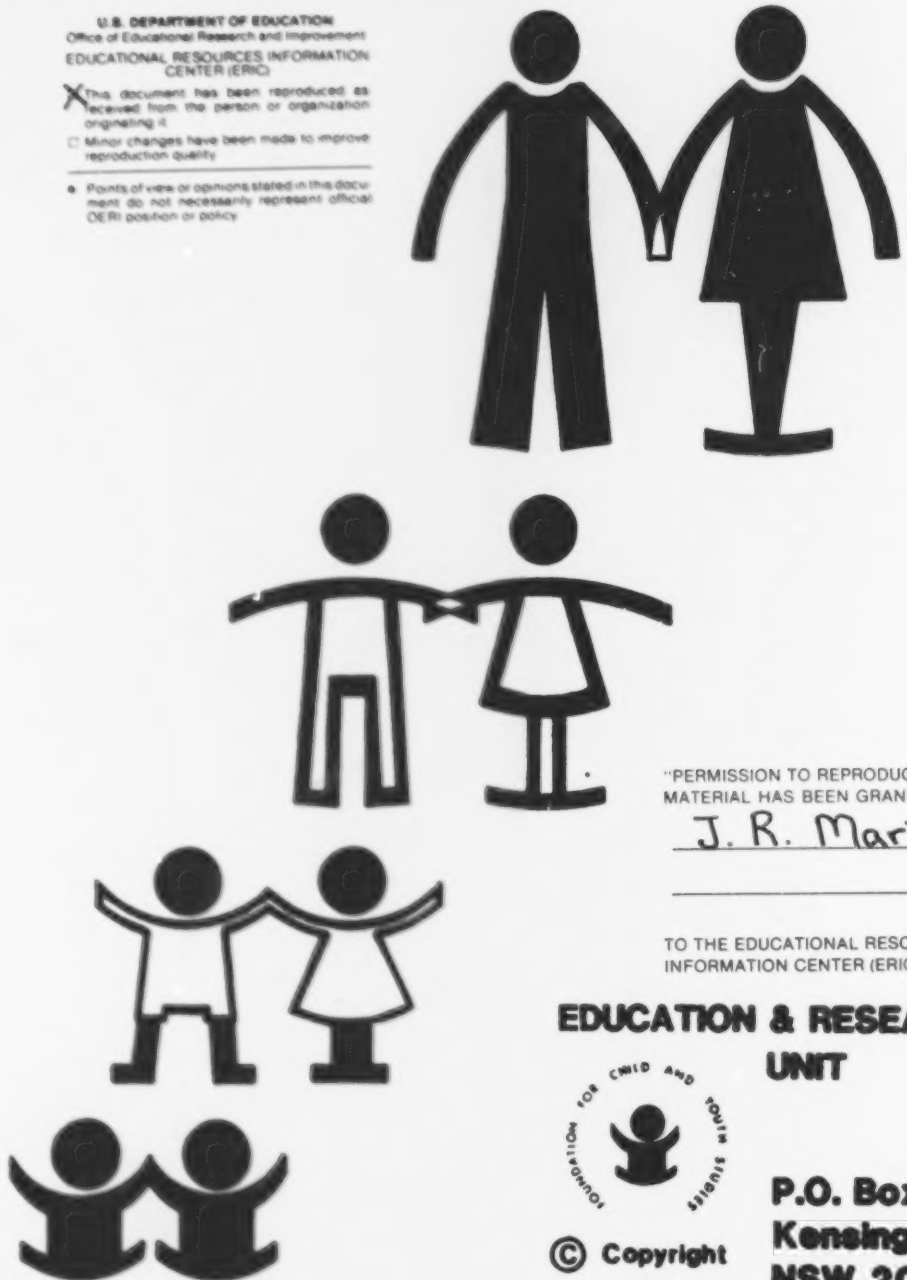

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THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION ON CHILDREN

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ISBN 0727-6834

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THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION ON CHILDREN

JULIA TREGONING

Introduction

Viewing Time

Television provides a series of communications, the frequency and pervasiveness of which are unique in world history (Winick 1963).

In the quarter century since television has been a reality in this country, our patterns of allocation of time and leisure have been radically changed. Television occupies more of our waking hours than any activity except work. A survey of Australian children showed a large percentage of them watched the equivalent of three full-length movies a day on television (Phillips 1979).

Meaney (Community Relations and Information Unit, NSW Education Department) notes that in 1982 on any school day children watch:

Hours of Television Watched by Children	Percentage of Children - as Reported by Children	Percentage of Children - as Reported by Parents
1-2	22%	32%
3-4	41%	44%
5 or more	35%	12%

This discrepancy in parent's and children's estimates of viewing hours has also been reported by Bednall (1979) who found that when researchers ask parents to complete viewing diaries for their children, and to estimate the degree of control over viewing, viewing hours are underestimated and control over-estimated for reasons of social desirability.

It would, however, be fair to say that the average child watches television for at least two hours a day - although Liebert and Schwartzberg (1977) claim that the average pre-schooler watches three to four hours a day, and the average 9-10 year child watches four to six hours a day. Depending on age, season of year and similar factors, children watch television from 17-30 hours weekly. Regular viewing typically begins around age 3 years and stays relatively high until 12 years, after which it declines (Winick).

In past generations, parents blamed their offspring's misbehaviour on radio, comic books, magazines and cheap novels. These days, television bears the brunt of the blame.

A Significant Developmental Experience

Because television occupies so much of children's lives in the home and outside school, it should be viewed as a significant developmental experience. The experience pool that each child builds is affected by what the child is exposed to and influenced by, and television increasingly is

contributing more to this pool while such traditional institutions as the home and school are contributing less.

Greenberg (1974) is primarily concerned with the child's point of view rather than the adult perspective. In a study of British children aged from nine to fifteen years, he discovered that from the child's perspective, television is most frequently watched in order to learn - both about themselves and about things they don't learn in school. Children also reported that they watched TV to pass time, to forget problems, because it is a habit, for excitement, for relaxation and for companionship. Rubin (1977) was able to replicate Greenberg's results with American children.

Monaco (1975) and several other researchers (e.g. Collins, Noble 1975) conclude from their studies that how children perceive television appears to reflect their cognitive stage

Most findings also appear to confirm the Piaget theory of the stages of cognitive development. Piaget defines a series of stages of cognitive development, each more complex than the preceding one. These stages are summarised briefly for those who are not familiar with them:

1 Sensorimotor Period (0-18 months)

In which the child displays reflexive actions - simple grasping, sucking and gradually develops the concept of object permanence (an object, out of sight, still exists). The child begins to distinguish him/herself from others

(This period is very briefly described since it is not relevant to this paper on television viewing.)

2. Pre-operational Period (18 months - 7 years)

Consists of:

a) Pre-conceptual thought (18 months - 4 years). The child shifts towards representational intelligence, i.e. he/she is able to internally (mentally) represent objects and actions. Hence, even as young as three, the child can want, remember and ask for products advertised on television.

b) Intuitive thought (4-7 years). The child relies on intuitive thought or perception rather than logical reasoning. The child cannot conserve or see that the ball of plasticene remains the same amount when rolled into different shapes. Instead he/she judges by perception, cannot reverse action mentally, does not follow transformations, is egocentric and cannot recognise compensations in length and width. Thus when watching "the Incredible Hulk" the child at this stage cannot understand that the man is in fact the same person when he transforms into the hulk, or that Clark Kent and 'Superman' are the same person.

3 The Concrete Operational Period (7-12 Years)

In the child of about 7 years a whole series of more complex schemas or structures which Piaget calls Operations are developed. Operations are complex mental actions, like classifying, ordering, multiplication and division. They are reversible in that the child is able to go back over and to relate to previous experiences thus building a system of operations that allows the older child to reason logically about concrete objects.

(i) The child rejects perception in favour of logical decisions provided there is concrete evidence. So, for example when 'Spiderman' climbs up a building the older child reasons that this is not possible.

(ii) His/her thought is reversible (a cold day could have been hot). When watching television - the hero could have been killed and not won in the end.

(iii) Solves conservation problems.

Conservation is basically the ability to take into account more than one feature at a time and to focus upon the transformation between one state and another. For example a tall thin glass holds the same amount of water as a short wide glass even though the water level is higher. Piaget holds that there is a definite progression of attainment of conservation. Conservation of quantity appears first, followed by weight & finally, towards the end of the concrete period, by volume.

(iv) Develops concepts of velocity (time & speed), of number,

(v) considers & co-ordinates others' perspective (ability to play team games, co-operative work). Hence television dramas appeal to this age group. They can become actively involved, seeing both sides of a situation.

Logical thought is still embedded in concrete objects and events. Difficulty with verbally stated hypothesis.

4. <u>The Formal Operational Period (12 - 15 years +)</u>

Thought is that of an intelligent adult. The adolescent at this stage is capable of scientific reasoning: hypothetical thinking, deducing consequences and putting them to the test. While the concrete thinking child can only apply his/her logical thinking to concrete situations, the formal thinking individual can apply it to all classes of problems including hypothetical abstract and verbal problems.

For further information on this topic, refer Foundation of Child and Youth Studies, Selected Paper number 30. "How Children Think" Dr. Shelley Phillips Summer 1983.

<u>Examples of Changing Developmental Tastes in Television Viewing</u>

At these development levels different types of programmes tend to command children's attention. Cartoons which require no logical reasoning will appeal to the three-year-old; the seven-year-old enjoys situational comedies because he/she can now see other people's points of view; and by ten years the intricate workings of a drama have the most appeal.

Kindergarteners, mostly in the second half of the pre-operations stage, enjoy fast-moving cartoons such as "Bugs Bunny" or "Inspector Gadget" where endings do not need to be deduced, whereas fifth-graders, mostly in the second half of the stage of concrete operations, prefer the realistic thought-provoking dramas such as "A Country Practice" or "Neighbours".

One of the reasons for the central attraction of children to television is that the medium presents a character who is constant from programme to programme, week to week, and season to season (Monaco 1976). Monaco believes that the models for identification provided by television might be particularly important now when the extended family has been declining, resulting in less family involvement.

Therefore, since children spend 20% to 30% of their waking lives in front of television sets (Anderson 1977) it is worth studying television viewing because it is a very large part of what children do.

This is a vast topic, but the following seem to be some of the more important facets and so, will be discussed in this paper:

I Television and Learning
II Television and Violence
III Television and Advertising
IV Television and Parents

I Television and Learning

Many studies have been conducted on children's hours of television viewing (e.g. ABC 1979; Tindal, Reid and Goodwin, 1977, Braithwaite & Holman 1981) and all conclude that the hours of viewing are often comparable to the hours that children spend at school and are in many cases in excess of the hours of formal education (Lacy 1980).

Cooney (1984) states that by the time a child completes high school, he or she will have spent 24,000 hours watching T.V., as compared with 12,000 hours in the classroom. Heinz (1983) estimates a little more conservatively that by 18 years of age children will have 18,000 hours watching TV compared with 15,000 hours in the classroom. From this, in terms of hours of exposure, television seems to be as important an influence on children's education as is formal schooling.

a) Active and Passive Television Viewing

There is much controversy over whether children sit passively watching television allowing the action to "wash over" them or whether they actively process what they watch, and thus learn from it.

Passive viewing differs from active viewing as a result of the viewer's motivation and intellectual or cognitive competence as well as the form and content of the programme. If the viewer is insufficiently interested or incapable of understanding the messages in the presentation, or if the programme is either very simple or highly familiar, then the viewing will tend to be passive.

Hence a seven-year-old watching "Sesame Street" is not likely to join in when invited, since the material would be too easy to present any challenge. On the other hand a two-year-old would probably watch, but not participate actively since the material presented would be unfamiliar.

Lorch, Anderson and Levin (1979) concluded from their studies that learning from television involves active selection and processing by the child rather than passive reception, and that the match between the programme material and the child's level of understanding is an important determinant of learning. A child watching even an educational programme, which is above his level of comprehension, will not learn from it. Whereas a five-year-old watching "Playschool" can actively participate and learns because the programme material is pitched at the child's level of understanding.

It should not be expected that children will learn much through simple observation of television without active involvement in the process. This involvement can be occasioned by the way in which the programme itself is constructed (Wright, Watkins, and Huston-Stein 1978) and by parents and teachers who help to explain actions, intentions and motives of characters, sequence and causality in the plot. By so doing they can involve the viewers in active processing of television information.

While both passive and active viewing occurs at all ages, Wright and Huston (1972) believe there is a progressive shift with age and viewing experience from relatively passive, momentary enjoyment of the sights and sounds of television toward active processing (Wright, Watkins and Huston-Stein).

So the four-year-old child is likely to sit enjoying the movement, the colour and the sound rather than thinking about what will happen next. On the other hand, the ten-year-old enjoys following a story such as "Sons and Daughters" or "Magnum" and working out the plot, who is right and who is wrong and other possible solutions to problems with which characters are presented.

Those concerned with child development often feel that television encourages passivity by feeding children information for which, otherwise they would have to actively seek outside television (Fowles and Voyat, 1974, Fakouri 1984). If television teaching encouraged passive learning, it would certainly be harmful to a child's advanced education and detrimental to success and satisfaction as an adult. Evidence suggests that television can, in fact, initiate active behaviour when the appropriate devices are used. The fact that children may make few <u>obvious</u> responses while viewing is taken as evidence that little processing is taking place. However this interpretation does not allow for the child's actual thought involvement with the material being viewed. It has not yet been proven that television encourages a passive state in young children, and there is much evidence to the contrary (e.g. Bower 1977, Meaney 1985).

Wright and Huston see television viewing as an intellectually <u>active</u> pastime for children and one that involves many, if not all of their developing intellectual skills. For example, even in a show such as "Knight Rider" the child needs to look and listen carefully, thinking and reasoning in order to work out the plot.

They hypothesize that with increasing age there is a greater range of televised presentations that elicit active viewing. So that as the child has more experience with the world and with television, the number and variety of programmes that are familiar and comprehensible will increase. This means that while children still enjoy a situational comedy such as "Family Ties" they will move on as they get older to enjoy all sorts of other programmes - dramas such as the A-Team and on to more intricate mysteries such as James Bond movies. At the same time they can still enjoy the fast moving action of a cartoon such as "Inspector Gadget".

Katz & Liebes (1984) in a cross-cultural study of "Dallas" also concluded that viewing is both an active and social process. They found that during and after the programme people discuss what they have seen and come to collective understandings. This then, is active viewing.

Several Australian researchers have also stressed that children are active in making sense of their experiences with television (Noble 1975, 1982, Tripp 1980). The five-year-old enjoys getting up to dance, sing and chant with the "Romper Room" children

In their evaluative studies of the ABC's "Play School", both Noble and Taplin reflect the stance that children are active users and processors of television as do Palmer (1984) and Meaney (1984).

b) Cognitive Learning, Education and Television

In view of the time children devote to watching television and its prominence within our culture, it would be inconceivable that children's cognitive skills were not applied to, and affected by the medium.

Television's impact is mediated by the cognitive activities underlying the television viewing experience itself. As Collins; Choat (1984); Cantor & Wilson (1984) and others have shown, children's understanding of television and so, presumably, its impact, depends on the children's level of cognitive development. But comprehension of a television programme depends as well on attention to the programme (Anderson 1977).

The area of cognitive learning from television has been a relatively neglected field in Australian research with a few exceptions. In his work on cognitive development and children's use of television, Noble (1975; 1980) provides evidence that children process television information according to their level of (Piagetian) cognitive development. He has conducted research on young children's response to television according to whether or not they have attained the level of operational thinking. Work on the relationship between Piagetian stages of cognitive development and use of television is also being carried out by the Active Eye Project (Tripp, 1980).

Most work on cognition and television viewing has used children's memory for programme content and structure as an indication of their cognitive processing. In an investigation of children's recognition and recall of television programmes, Rendell (1979) found that 6-7 year olds were extremely good at recall of sequence and that 11 year olds were better at this task than were young adults. The eleven-year-old for example can relate in minute detail and with incredible accuracy the whole sequence of events in an episode of "Magnum".

In a paper on the relationship between age, memory and comprehension of television cartoons, Knowles and Nixon (1980) examined children's memory and drawing of inference from the

programmes and suggested that children's drawing of inference from television cartoons appeared earlier than research on inference from printed text would predict.

One argument against the use of television for educational purposes is that any interaction between television and children must be one-way. To be effective educationally, Emery and Emery (1975) argue, interaction must be two-way with a child responding to and participating in any learning experience. In his paper for the Schools Commission on the instructional use of television, Gill (1980) also stressed the limitations on learning implied by a one-way interaction with television.

On the other hand, Noble has been concerned with the ways in which children do actively interact with television. In his work on "Play School" for example, Noble found that children did respond to the programme by getting up and dancing, or singing, or answering questions posed; and that such a programme can elicit response from normally non-communicative children. They will call out an answer or participate with hand actions.

Sesame Street

One of television's major programming attempts to educate children is "Sesame Street," which is designed to teach both cognitive and social skills. The programme began in 1969 and is still going strong. Eimee Leifer (1973) showed that "Sesame Street" can influence the child's social development in such areas as co-operation. But the major evaluation of "Sesame Street" has focused on its impact on the child's cognitive development. A national study of "Sesame Street," conducted by Sam Ball and Gerry Bogatz (1970), evaluated such major cognitive outcomes as symbolic representation (e.g. letters, numbers and geometric forms), problem solving, and reasoning. The results are impressive. Children who frequently watch "Sesame Street" scored higher on these measures of cognitive development than did children who watch infrequently.

Children from both low-income and middle-income families who watched the show often made gains on the cognitive measures; children from low-income families who did not watch the show often did not make such gains.

Sesame Street shows how scientific knowledge about the ways children think and learn at a certain age can be applied to creating an educational programme for children. First, the creators of Sesame Street wanted to determine what attracted the attention of their potential audience and to emphasize these elements in the programme. Examples of such elements are animation, puppets, and sound effects. Second, Sesame Street made use of the Piagetian principle of knowledge acquisition that applies to all ages: to learn something new, you generally need to be able to relate it to something you already know. Thus, to teach letter shapes, segments would start with a familiar object having the same shape as the letter being taught Y, for example, might be compared with a fork in the road. Third, Sesame Street used the principle that repetition enhances learning. Testing a segment designed to teach recognition of

the letter J, the researchers found that more children learned the letter after seeing the segment several times than after seeing it once.

The show also uses repetition to get children to participate actively, because active involvement is generally necessary for learning. For example, in one segment the actor James Earl Jones recites the alphabet, and each letter appears next to his head a moment before he says it. The first time through, the child sees and says the letters along with Jones. After a few repetitions, the child starts to anticipate Jones, saying each letter after it appears on the screen but before Jones recites it. With still more repetition, the child names the letter before it appears. The anticipation elicited by repetition enables the child to learn the alphabet as well as to recognise the individual letters.

However, many researchers believe that television, even though it is a one-way medium, can be used to make the child an active participant. That is, the child can be motivated to react and join in, and not just sit. Observations of four-year-olds watching Sesame Street prove that the show also elicits, in most children, other types of activity, such as imitating verbal or physical action that has taken place on the show.

The importance of activity to learning is stressed. Turning television from a passive to an active medium is central to exploiting its teaching potential. Sesame Street makes the important point that through the judicious use of carefully chosen techniques television can, on its own, make the child an active participant. He or she can be easily drawn out to join in and call out answers or sing along.

The teacher is in a particularly strong position to take advantage of the existence of the maturational differential in using children's home television viewing in a class room situation. The children in a class are presumably within the same maturational epoch and at the same Piagetian cognitive level, so that their perceptions take place within a somewhat predictable range. Children, particularly in primary school, are likely to be watching the same programmes, so that there is often a common base of programme experience and reactions. The teacher is often able to apply this developmental approach to the use of children's entertainment programmes in the primary school. Discussion of relevant programmes can be initiated by the teacher with different approaches to solving problems and different points of view being explored.

c) Television as a Socialisation Agent

In recent years, the importance of television as a socialising agent has been widely recognised (Leifer, Gordon & Graves, 1974; Liebert, Neale & Davidson, 1973). A host of Studies based on Bandura's (1969) conceptualisation of observational learning, has been conducted to show that children learn both pro-social and anti-social behaviours from models they observe on television (Moore, 1977; Stein & Friedrich, 1975). Such behaviours are not necessarily manifested at the time of learning, but are acquired and may subsequently be performed should the appropriate circumstances arise (Hicks, 1965).

George Comstock (1978) argues that television is such a strong socialisation force on the child that it should be given status as a social agent, competing with parents, teachers, and other agents in providing models for emulation and information that influence the child's beliefs, values and expectations. Thus the child who idolizes the Fonze in "Happy Days" will be as greatly influenced by Fonzie's beliefs and values and methods of solving problems as he/she will be by his/her teacher's values.

Noble & Freiberg (1985) are particularly interested in the child's perspective and in a study conducted with primary children from Armidale found that "As far as learning is concerned, results indicate that from the child's point of view, television is both stimulating and thought-provoking. Moreover what is learnt is not conventionally taught in school and seems to relate to characters' experiences rather than hard fact and can in turn be translated into practical use." So, from "A Country Practice" the eleven-year-old learns how to deal with real-life experiences such as divorce or the death of a pet. Programmes such as this have been found to favourably influence such things as the incidence of Annorexia Nervosa and protection for abused children.

Television in our society is especially effective in providing opportunities for vicarious learning because it opens the world to children with a turn of the switch. It has potential effectiveness in communicating to children important concepts that will assist them in their development. Along with its constructive potential, it also provides unplanned language experience simply through the creative process of telling a dramatic story or offering a comedy situation.

It is clear then, that television is a world into which children enter with great ease. They watch, take in and are able to retain enormous amounts of information. So television must be accepted as a very important socialising influence.

This could be used to great advantage in teaching children, through enjoyable means, how to handle life's situations, how to cope with difficulties and solve problems.

Television is one of our most significant communications inventions. An invention that presents role models for children, influences their opinions, forms their attitudes and moulds their minds (Hartman, 1969).

II Television and Violence

The question as to whether violence on television increases the incidence of aggressive behaviour in children has been extensively reviewed in recent studies. Evans and McCandless (1978) cite several studies in their discussion on this matter and in fact conclude that "children and adolescents viewing high levels of aggressive and violent content on television tend to have high levels of aggressive behaviour regardless of viewing time, social status or school performance".

The definition of violence used in most studies is "the overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed" (Gerbner, 1972). By this definition, the average television drama has eight acts of violence

each hour. Children's cartoons, in contrast, have about twenty to thirty episodes of violence per hour (Gerbner and Gross, 1974).

Slaby, Quarfoth and McConnachie (1976) found that television violence was high in the early morning, when young children watch cartoons, dropped during "nap time" in the afternoon, and then rose again during the after-school and after-dinner hours. This would indicate that television stations screen violence at these times because children enjoy watching violence. There must be truth in this assumption if the squeals of laughter and delight as the cat in the Tom and Jerry cartoon leaps over the cliff and is hopelessly flattened at the bottom are any indication of the children's enjoyment of violence.

Bee (1981) in her review of research findings concluded:

1. Children do learn specific aggressive actions from watching them.

2. Children who watch violent television are more aggressive with their playmates than are children who watch less violent television (Liebert and Schwartzberg, 1977). However if the child knows that the parents disapprove of aggression, the effect of the television violence is lessened to some extent.

3 The effects of seeing violence on television seem to be cumulative. The more violent programmes the child sees, the more aggressive he/she seems to become (Steuer, Applefield and Smith, 1971).

4. Children who watch a lot of violent television have different attitudes about aggression. Dominick and Greenberg (1972) found that elementary school age children who watched a lot of violent programmes were more likely to think that aggression was a good way to solve problems than were less heavy viewers. This effect was weakened if the children came from families that disapproved of aggression.

Television violence showed up in the classroom in a study by Monroe Lefkowitz and his colleagues (1972). They found a significant relationship between the amount of television violence that third grade boys watched and their classroom aggression as rated by their peers. Even more interesting is their finding of a relationship between the amount of television violence that boys watched in the third grade and their aggression at age nineteen.

The factors controlling expression of aggression are exceedingly complex, but these studies appear to indicate that television violence may both teach new forms of aggressive behaviour (such as the recent growth of interest in kung-fu) and relax inhibitions against aggressive expression.

Other studies, however, indicate that the long-term effect of heavy television watching may, in fact, be less violence, not more. When George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976) compared viewing habits with perceptions of the world, they found that people who watched four or more hours of television each day tended to be significantly more suspicious of others and afraid of being involved in violence themselves than people who watched television two hours or less each day. In their studies they confirmed that violence-laden television may cultivate

aggressive tendencies in a minority, but more importantly it generates a pervasive and exaggerated sense of danger and mistrust. However, it may have been that the heavy television viewers had suspicious tendencies anyway and this characteristic had led them to withdraw and watch large amounts of television. In other words it may not have been that their suspiciousness was caused by heavy viewing of violence.

They also discovered that nearly half the twelve year olds they studied watched at least six hours of television each day. Gerbner and Gross therefore believe that heavy television viewing may teach people to play the role of victim and become passive in the face of aggression.

David Pearl (1984) also concedes this possibility. He says that ultimately, when children have viewed enormous amounts of violent behaviour, they may come to identify with the victim, thus minimising their own aggressive behaviour. However, since almost all television programmes ensure that the "goodie" wins, it would seem unlikely that children would identify with the victim or the "badie".

If, on the other hand, the hero is hurt, he always recovers very quickly so that children are being taught that violence does not hurt much anyway. The 'pain' side of violence is always played down. This then, reduces the child's fear of violence.

Two comprehensive reviews of the literature (Howitt and Cumberbatch 1975; Kaplan and Singer 1976) have come to the conclusion that the research does not prove a relationship between television and aggressive behaviour. Most experts in the field, however, agree that there is clearly a relationship between television violence and later aggressive behaviour. Comstock (1976) Rubinstein (1978), Watt and Krull (1977) and Huesmann, Lagerspetz & Eron (1984) are among those who have reaffirmed that conclusion.

David Pearl (1984) maintains strongly that according to many researchers the evidence accumulated in the 1970s and early 1980s suggests overwhelmingly that televised violence & aggression are positively correlated in children. He says children learn aggression from violent television through observational learning; attitude changes (the more they see, the more accepting they are of aggressive behaviour); physiological arousal (the excitement of violence); and justification processes (it's all right to behave aggressively because a television hero behaves that way). The justification process pointed out by Pearl is a very real consideration. Through viewing violence children run the risk of assuming that the most effective problem - solving strategy is the use of violence. Their television heroes resolve their dilemmas with violence so therefore that is the best way around a problem.

Berger (1981) holds that pre-school children are even more likely to be influenced by violence on television than older children are, because they have an especially hard time differentiating reality from fantasy. In television cartoons the good guys do as much hitting, shooting and kicking as the bad guys and the consequences of their violence are never portrayed as bloody or evil.

Bee (1981) claims that all these effects can be lessened by parents who demonstrate non-aggressive ways of solving problems and who disapprove of aggressive actions in their children. More important, parents can control the sort of programmes their children watch.

Violence is an issue with which parents and educators must concern themselves. The subject is a controversial one and one widely discussed by the experts.

A study of the research and evidence presented by the experts would seem to indicate that, on balance, televised violence is not desirable. Research shows and logic dictates that watching heroes and heroines using violence to solve problems must encourage children to emplov aggressive behaviour themselves.

There is no doubt that childen find violence exciting even at a very young age. Moreover, violence is a part of the real world and therefore it would be unrealistic to exclude violence totally from television.

The answer probably lies in "moderation". If violence is only a small part of the television diet, children can learn other alternative problem-solving devices and experience a wealth of other emotions and situations. Finally, it is very clear that parents should be aware of the amount of violence being watched and should preferably watch such shows with their children. They should then ensure through comments and discussion that their children understand that violence is not the best way of solving problems and although it does exist it is not desirable in itself.

III Television and Advertising

When children watch television, they not only see cartoon shows and adult programmes, but they also are exposed to advertisements. The average television-viewing child, somewhat amazingly, sees over 22,000 commercials per year (Heinz 1983). A significant proportion of those advertisements involve highly sugared food products (Barcus, 1978). To investigate the effects of television food commercials and pronutritional public service announcements on children's snack choices, Joann Galst (1980) exposed three to six-year-old children to television cartoons over a four-week period. The advertising content of the shows consisted of either commercials for food products with added sugar content, for food products with no added sugar content, or pronutritional public service announcements.

The children were allowed to select a snack each day after the television show. The no-sugar commercial and pronutritional public service announcement were the most effective in reducing children's selection of sugar added snacks.

F. Earle Barcus sums up his review of the literature on advertising "There is evidence that the child does develop brand preferences and that he or she also pressures parents to buy". He goes on to say that the content characteristics of children's advertisements include the types of products advertised, the manner in which they are presented, attention-getting devices and the types of verbal disclosures. They often include appeals to the child through verbal reasons for buying and visual messages which reinforce certain values. These characteristics of television advertising to children constitute messages about the world beyond the home and may be important illustrations of that world for that child viewer.

Charles K. Atkin notes that there is ample evidence that television advertising plays a dominant role in shaping children's product preferences. Both experiments and surveys show how exposure to advertising increases desire for, requests for, and consumption of advertised products. (Atkin, Reeves and Gibson 1979, Atkin 1957, Ward 1972, Howard, Hulbert and Lehmann 1977 etc).

Heavier viewers of television advertising are far more likely than are lighter viewers to request that parents buy food and toy products for them (Atkin, 1979, Sharaga, 1984).

Advertising influences not only food preferences, but it can also shape the basic nutritional beliefs and attitudes of the child (Atkin and Heald 1977, Barcus 1978). Young viewers may therefore develop correct or incorrect beliefs about nutrition. This places a responsibility upon advertisers to give correct information since young children do believe what they hear. With incorrect information, wrong beliefs about such things as nutrition will be fostered.

Advertising can cause much parent/child conflict when demands by children are not satisfied (Atkin, 1975) or it can cause unhappiness on the part of the child (Goldberg and Corn 1978).

Ellen Wartella's review of the research on children's information processing of television advertising messages and on the impact of these messages on children's own consumer product decision making leads her to conclude that the major individual difference factor which mediates advertising's influence is age of the viewers. In general, younger children's attention to advertisements appears to be more heavily influenced by various production factors such as use of movement, colour and music. They appear to have lower recall and understanding of advertising claims, and their trust in advertising is higher. Moreover, younger children's pattern of purchasing requests and decisions appears to be more heavily influenced by advertising messages.

Children, especially young children do appear to be heavily influenced by the advertiser in whom they place great trust. If they are told on television that a particular spread in delicious, they will believe it and beg their mothers to buy it.

The techniques of fast-moving action, colour and music are used forcefully before Christmas when advertising directed at children is significantly increased - and with wonderful results from those trusting little viewers!

Berger's explanation for this is that pre-school children usually accept commercial messages uncritically, because, being pre-operational, they are unable to understand that advertisements are intended to sell products, rather than entertain or report the whole truth. Because young children thus have virtually no sales resistance, the burden of restraint is on the parents.

IV Television and Parents

A growing group of critics is concerned that even the best television does more harm than good because it robs children of play time and reading time, making them less creative, less verbal, less social, less independent (Singer and Singer 1977, Winn 1977).

Studies have shown that children who watch a lot of television tend to be lower achievers than children who watch a little television (Stein and Friedrich 1975).

Edgar (1977) and Edgar and Callus (1979) also found that low self-esteem was associated with longer hours of television viewing in children.

On the other hand many researchers and experts in the field (e.g. Winick, Meaney, Salomon, Wright and Huston etc) maintain that television, when used properly by parents, presents the child with a world that is often different from the one he or she lives in. This means that through television the child is exposed to a wider variety of views and knowledge than may be the case from parents, teachers or peers. Television is also a medium through which the child can learn new behaviours. It opens children to vast worlds of experience that were previously unavailable. It educates and illustrates things that remained abstractions to preceding generations.

However, despite these differing views, almost no research has been done on what parents would probably most like to know; how to counteract the influence of the social information children get from television. We do know that by discussing shows with children, parents or other adults can increase the benefits and decrease the negative effects of watching commercial television programmes.

To be more specific, parents can affect what social knowledge children take away from a show by highlighting important information and by interpreting what is going on in the show. There is ample evidence to suggest that co-viewing with an adult can facilitate children's comprehension and learning from viewing television (Wright & Huston, 1983).

In an American study of this type of situation, four and five-year-olds watched an episode of the family hour programme Adam-12. The episode dealt with students being truant from school and getting into trouble. One group of students watched the show with a teacher who made neutral comments such as "Let's sit here and watch a television show". A second group watched with the same teacher, but the teacher made explanatory comments such as "Oh, no! that boy is in trouble. He did not go to school when he was supposed to. He was playing hookey and that is bad." Children in the second group learned more specific details of the programme, increased their knowledge of truancy, and increased their positive attitudes in the direction of the teacher's comments. The differences between the two groups were still evident one week later, indicating that the discussion promoted retention as well as immediate learning.

The simple process is one that parents can easily follow at home, if they are willing to watch television with their children. Observation of what actually goes on in homes indicates that parents and children often do watch television together, but that the parents seldom provide this type of commentary.

Although television may sometimes seem to put forth a uniform message about the nature of the social world, we have seen that diverse messages do exist and that television can have quite opposite influences on social attitudes depending on programme content. These facts have an obvious yet important implication for parents: they should select shows for their children and help the children to be selective themselves. While all parents will not agree on the social values they want to teach their children, all parents do socialise their children into one set of values or another. Selection, as well as discussion of television programmes, needs to be looked upon not as a form of censorship but as an extension of this normal and universal process of socialisation.

It is useful to remember that television seems to be especially influential in forming attitudes and knowledge on topics with which the child lacks experience. Children who have first-hand knowledge of a topic make a clearer separation between the real world and the television world. Thus, parents can counteract television by giving their children first-hand experience in areas they consider important.

Nobel & Frieberg (1985) state quite categorically, after much research, "There is no doubt that children who watch mainly the ABC have parents who monitor & control their children's viewing."

Some professionals recommend no television at all, especially for pre-schoolers. Others suggest that parents watch with their children, so that they can personalise the learning on educational programmes and criticize or censor the content of non educational-television. Many parents have found it easier to impose a simple rule, e.g. only an hour a day, than to try to prohibit television completely or censor each programme. Virtually no psychologist who has studied the effects of children's television thinks parents should let their pre-schoolers watch whatever and whenever they want.

Holman (1980) provided a framework of the following list of points to help parents control the influence of and foster positive gains from television:

1. Be really aware of your children's viewing patterns: Know how much TV they watch. Many parents <u>think</u> they know, but in fact do not really realize just how much or exactly <u>what</u> their children <u>are</u> watching. Restrict the viewing to a sensible limit so that other more active leisure patterns are not totally displaced.

2. Monitor your child's programme preferences - know what they like to watch; make sure that you approve of the content. Teach them to be critical viewers.

3. Discourage the viewing of violent programmes. If your child is exposed to violence on TV, try to make your own values about this clear - help the child to understand that violence is generally undesirable & that many other problem solving strategies exist.

4. Fact & Fantasy are difficult for young children to distinguish - you can help them to make this distinction if you talk about the programmes with them.

5. If you wish to promote knowledge being offered via television, watch the programmes with your child and discuss them. Cognitive skills and social skills are acquired much more quickly when an important adult is present to discuss and thereby encourage the process.

6. Teach your child to become a critical consumer. Goods advertised on television may be unnecessary or undesirable.

7. Don't be afraid to say 'no'. If you find your child watching programmes which you consider to be undesirable - you can turn the television off, explaining your reasons.

8. Encourage your children to watch programmes which you consider desirable, interesting or beneficial to them.

Fakouri (1984) states categorically that "The time has come for us to 'educate' children for television viewing".

The parent who supervises correctly can set the scene for appropriate viewing and will be close at hand to deal with problems when they arise. Parents should make sure that time is left available to play and discover the real world.

Conclusion

What a child does with television and what television does to a child are reciprocal or interdependent processes. The general assumption is that how children react to television is influenced by what they see and how they interpret what they see is influenced by what they have already seen. This then is an ongoing cycle.

It is still a very controversial subject - television or no television? Advantages, disadvantages? However, none can deny that the advent of television more than a generation ago has certainly changed the nature of childhood. Television viewing is with us, it wakes us in the morning, accompanies us as we work, shop, socialise and at meals. We now must accept the fact that it is an integral part of children's lives and thus a very real part of their education as well.

Television has given us some of the most astonishing moments of a lifetime: the first footsteps on the moon, the launch and landings of the space shuttle, the assassination and funeral of an American president, the Wedding of the future King of England, the Voyager I discoveries, live Olympic Games coverages and the exciting Australian victory in the America Cup Challenge, to name a few. Television has demonstrated it has no peer in presenting major news events, documentaries, sports and drama.

The generation of children who have never lived without television is now in adulthood. The electronic miracle has affected their knowledge of the world, their activities, heroes, time spent with their peers and a variety of other factors. Many of today's children are a product of that experience.

This paper is based on a seminar given in the post-graduate course in September 1985, run by the Foundation for Child and Youth Studies.

With special thanks to Dr. Shelley Phillips for her great help.

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